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ABSTRACT

The question of whether students perceive full-time faculty as more effective than part-time faculty was studied near the end of each term during academic year 1979-80. Graduate business administration students at a comprehensive state university and a private research university evaluated the affectiveness of their courses and instructors. Average ratings on each item were calculated by class, and means of the combined rating averages by item by instructor type (full- or part-time) were calculated. Course and instructor ratings were further divided by subject field as either quantitative (accounting, economics, finance, and operations research) and nonquantitative (management theory, organizational theory, and social/legal aspects). At the comprehensive state university, no statistically significant differences between full-time and part-time faculty were found for any of the items in quantitative classes. In the nonquantitative courses, there were significant differences on items representing the rating dimension of "enthusiasm," "interaction," and "rapport." At the private research university, full-time faculty teaching quantitative classes were rated significantly higher than part-time faculty on items representing "enthusiasm," "learning," and "rapport." Full-time faculty teaching nonquantitative classes were rated significantly higher on all items but one. The results suggest that both groups tend to receive above average evaluations from their students, at least at the two institutions and subject areas involved. Implications for decision-making regarding the number of part-timers in a department are briefly considered. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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THE GROWTH OF PART-TIME FACULTY: ECONOMIC AND QUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

by

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Institutional Research, Minneapolis, May 1981. Requests for reprints should be sent to the authors at the Office of Institutional Studies, LDS Annex, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90007.

ABSTRACT

Declining enrollments and steady-state budgets have encouraged filling full-time faculty openings with part-time faculty. Despite the availability of empirical support for the economic benefits, little empirical data exist concerning the consequences for instructional quality. This study investigated the instructional effectiveness of selected graduate faculty at both a comprehensive state university and a private research university. Results for quantitative courses suggest that part-time and full-time faculty effectiveness are similar. However, in non-quantitative classes, part-time faculty tended to be more effective at the public institution, while full-time faculty received consistently higher evaluations at the private institution. Explanations and implications of these findings are discussed.

The Growth of Part-time Faculty:

Economic and Quality Considerations

Background

Declining enrollments and steady-state budgets have had a negative impact on opportunities for long term, career-orientated faculty appointments. Inflation and recent federal legislation raising the mandatory retirement age have also contributed to a decline in such opportunities.

Competition for the declining number of position vacancies has been intensified by the growing tendency of post-secondary institutions to hire on a part-time--as opposed to full-time--basis. By 1978, 31% of instructional faculty at these institutions were part-time, compared with just 22% in 1970 (NCES, 1980). Furthermore, part-timers increased at a faster rate than full-timers during this time period. According to Dearman and Plisko (1980), part-time faculty doubled while their full-time counterparts increased 21% between 1970 and 1978.

Administrators, attempting to staff existing vacancies in a cost-effective manner, find part-time faculty an attractive alternative to full-time faculty (Magarrell, 1978; Mahr and Ebben, 1978). To begin with, part-time faculty are not usually entitled to tenure, and thus can be utilized on an "as needed" basis (Tuckman, 1981). Furthermore, part-timers normally receive a base salary that averages less than that for their full-time colleagues based on comparable teaching experience. Finally, part-time faculty rarely receive institutionally-related benefits (e.g. health, life insurance, and retirement contributions) in addition to their base salaries (Tuckman and Vogler, 1979).

Tenured faculty, on the other hand, have resisted attempts to fill dwindling vacancies with part-timers (NEA, 1976). While cognizant of the economic issues involved, they perceive that, for reasons such as the following, the quality of full-time faculty is superior: 1) broader experience in, and commitment to, teaching and research; 2) a greater sense of departmental and institutional loyalty; 3) higher levels of academic preparation and accomplishment; 4) more comprehensive knowledge about how their particular field evolved and what the current trends are in it (see also Jessup, 1975; Leslie, 1978; and, Tuckman, 1978 for slightly different perspectives).

While administrators have had little difficulty in providing quantitative estimates of the economic benefits to using different levels of part-time faculty, those supporting the "quality" position have found it more difficult to provide similar evidence (Overall, 1980). One of the areas most likely to provide such quantitative evidence--students' evaluations of instructional effectiveness--has to date remained relatively untapped. With the exception of Fleming's 1981 comparison of full-time and part-time faculty effectiveness at the community college level (no major differences between students' evaluations of these two groups were found), the authors could locate no recently published material on the subject.

Thus, the intent of this study was to provide data that would help clarify at least the instructional effectiveness aspect of the "quality" issue. The study was designed to determine whether or not full-time faculty were perceived as more effective by their students than were part-time faculty. To investigate the generalizability of the findings, the study was based on results from two different university settings. The definition of part-time faculty used in this study corresponds with that suggested by the American Association of University Professors, and includes those whose workload is normally less than full-time. Excluded are students employed by the same department as that in which they are earning their degree, and full-time faculty who voluntarily choose to teach a reduced load.

Procedure and Analysis

Toward the end of each term during academic year 1979-80, graduate business administration students at a comprehensive state university and a private research university in California evaluated the effectiveness of their courses and instructors. Average ratings on each rating item were calculated by class. Means of the combined rating averages by item by instructor type (full- or part-time) were then calculated. Course and instructor ratings were further divided into those for quantitative (accounting, economics, finance, and operations research) and non-quantitative (management theory, organizational theory, and social/legal aspects) classes. T-tests of mean differences between full-time and part-time faculty ratings in the quantitative and non-quantitative courses were subsequently performed.

Because the evaluation questionnaires at both universities were similar, a comparison of results between universities was possible. Both questionnaires contained items that related to the rating dimensions of ENTHUSIASM, EXAMS/GRADING, INTERACTION, LEARNING, ORGANIZATION, AND RAPPORT; both also contained overall course and overall instructor rating items. The following analyses present results for each university, and for similar or identical items common to both.

Results

At the comprehensive state university, no statistically significant differences between full- and part-time faculty were found for any of the items in quantitative classes. In the non-quantitative courses, there were statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) on three items representing the rating dimensions of ENTHUSIASM, INTERACTION, and RAPPORT. These differences favored the part-time faculty. Results are presented in Table 1.

- - - - -Insert Table 1 about here- - - - -

At the private research university, full-time faculty teaching quantitative classes were rated significantly higher ($p<.05$) than part-time faculty on three items representing ENTHUSIASM, LEARNING, and RAPPORT dimensions. Full-time faculty teaching non-quantitative classes were rated significantly higher ($p<.05$) on all items but one. These differences included ENTHUSIASM, EXAMINATIONS, INTERACTION, LEARNING, ORGANIZATION, and RAPPORT evaluation dimensions, plus the overall course and overall instructor summary items. Results are presented in Table 2.

- - - - -Insert Table 2 about here- - - - -

Table 3 presents a comparison of results for those items that were similar or identical on evaluation questionnaires at both universities. These results more clearly present the generally higher ratings received on average by full-time faculty at the private research university, particularly in the non-quantitative courses. The contrast with results tending to favor part-time faculty at the comprehensive state university is apparent.

- - - - -Insert Table 3 about here- - - - -

Discussion and Conclusions

Looking at results for quantitative classes across both universities, statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) were found between full- and part-time faculty on 1) none of the 18 evaluation items at the state institution, and 2) only 3 of the 13 rating items at the private institution. In terms of practical significance, mean differences for only 2 of the 18 items exceeded half a rating category at the comprehensive state university, with one difference favoring full-time faculty (Table 1, item 3), and one favoring part-time faculty (Table 1, item 14). Mean differences for none of the 13 items even approached one-fourth of a rating category at the private university. Differences on the overall course and overall instruction rating items did not reach statistical or practical significance at either institution. Finally, evaluations received by full- and part-time faculty on most items--including the overall instructor and course items--were both above average.

Results for non-quantitative courses provide a different picture. At the state university, statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) between students' evaluations of full- and part-time faculty were found for only 3 of 18 items (Table 1, items 10, 11 and 13). Only two of these results (Table 1, items 10 and 11) represented differences of practical significance (at least half a rating category). At the private university, statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) between full- and part-time faculty evaluations were found for 11 of 13 items, with differences reaching the .01 level of significance for 10 of the items. All differences favored the full-time faculty, and except for items 9 and 13 (see Table 2), all were of practical significance as well (mean differences exceeded on-fourth a rating category). While full- and part-time faculty evaluations did not differ significantly on the overall course and overall instructor rating items at the state university, full-time faculty were rated significantly higher--both in a statistical and practical sense--at the research university. However, evaluations received by full- and part-time faculty on most items--including the overall instructor and course items--were both above average.

In attempting to understand the lack of consistency between results obtained at both institutions, several explanations may be relevant. First, it is probable that the characteristics and motives for teaching of the full- and part-time faculty members employed by the state institution differed systematically from the characteristics and motives of their counterparts at the private research university (see Tuckman, 1978). For example, it is likely that each institution posed different employment qualifications for its full- and part-time staff. In this particular sample, the private university, as a member of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), was bound by different employment guidelines than was the non-member state school.

A second explanation would provide data on the type of student admitted to each school. At the private research university, minimum performance levels required on the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT) differed significantly from the requirements of the state institution. Also, students' background characteristics and/or their rationales for pursuing their degrees were different. In this particular sample, the ratio of full- to part-time students at the private institution was much higher than that for the state university, as was the number of students who were not concurrently employed.

A third explanation would focus on the institutional context in which the faculty were teaching. At the state university, employment guidelines specified that of the three major faculty functions--research, teaching and university service--teaching was of primary importance. At the private university, the emphasis on research took precedence.

But what about the absence of systematic differences between full- and part-time faculty teaching quantitative courses at each institution, compared with the clear differences between full- and part-time faculty teaching non-quantitative courses? Again, explanations for this outcome most probably lie in differences to be found in faculty, student and institutional characteristics, in addition to differences relating to teaching the particular subject area involved.

While the absence of adequate data concerning faculty, student and institutional characteristics precludes the establishment of reasons for the similarities and differences noted at each university, the very existence of these similarities and differences is important. If institutions are using--or plan to use-- part-time faculty in any significant numbers, the results presented here indicate that variations in students' perceptions of instructional quality are possible. While further research may be able to provide insights into the mix of characteristics or motivations that are associated with insuring comparable instructional quality between full- and part-timers, institutions can undertake studies similar to the present investigation to determine the relative effectiveness of their part-time staff. Such investigations should focus on the departmental rather than on the institutional level, because the characteristics and motivations of part-time staff in professionally-oriented subject areas like business administration or engineering are probably more uniform than in less applied areas like philosophy or physics. Also, a focus on effectiveness in different types of classes--quantitative or non-quantitative, for example--would be useful.

The results of this study do not provide a basis for concluding that in general, full-time faculty are or are not perceived as more effective instructors than part-time faculty. They do suggest that both groups tend to receive above average evaluations from their students, at least at the two institutions and in the subject areas involved. Also, these findings illustrate that perceptions of effectiveness can vary, and that an investigation of the quality of current part-time faculty by each institution is strongly advisable before deciding to maintain or increase a department's current percentage of part-timers. Although the economic benefits of employing part-time faculty can be attractive, the results of this study indicate that a decline in perceived instructional quality is possible.

Looking toward the future, it is clear that once we have determined the relative effectiveness of our full- and part-time faculty, we must investigate why part-timers seem more effective in some environments than in others. We must begin to identify institutional, faculty and student variables that are positively associated with acceptable effectiveness levels. And in those instances where part-time faculty have been shown to be less effective than full-timers, we must develop some rationale for deciding the magnitude of economic benefits necessary to justify sacrificing increments of instructional quality.

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Table 1
t-Values for Mean Differences in Students' Evaluations of Full-Time (FT) and Part-Time (PT) Instructors in Quantitative and Non-Quantitative Graduate Business Administration Courses (Comprehensive State University)

Evaluation Item	Quantitative					Non-Quantitative				
	FT Faculty n = 44		PT Faculty n = 16			FT Faculty n = 26		PT Faculty n = 17		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t
To what extent do you (the student) feel that...										
1. Purpose of class assignments clear?	6.58	1.10	6.56	0.85	0.05	6.66	0.66	7.05	0.95	-1.58
2. Course objectives adequately outlined?	6.40	1.15	6.52	1.13	-0.36	6.61	0.76	6.93	1.10	-1.14
3. Class & exam emphasis similar?	6.90	1.08	6.36	1.40	1.60	7.01	0.70	6.83	0.98	0.69
4. Presentations prepared & organized?	6.33	1.35	5.88	1.12	1.15	6.93	0.73	6.92	1.29	0.03
5. Subject matter relevance discussed?	6.31	1.10	6.80	1.08	-1.51	7.15	0.55	7.33	0.82	-0.89
6. Something of value learned?	6.62	0.99	6.67	0.93	-0.15	7.06	0.63	7.14	0.87	-0.35
7. Course contents mastered?	6.24	0.96	6.36	0.86	-0.44	6.75	0.45	6.83	0.73	-0.45
8. You will study subject further?	5.61	1.00	5.63	1.01	-0.06	6.23	0.59	6.06	0.42	0.77
To what extent was the instructor...										
9. Concerned course material understood?	6.74	1.17	6.86	0.99	-0.37	6.79	0.50	7.06	0.86	-1.34
10. Enthusiastic about teaching course?	6.90	1.10	7.25	0.99	-1.16	6.98	0.71	7.47	0.74	-2.18*
11. Considerate of student point-of-view?	6.75	1.15	7.14	0.71	-1.27	6.98	0.77	7.48	0.75	-2.12*
12. Able to involve students in discussion?	6.37	1.17	6.85	0.82	-1.51	7.24	0.64	7.53	0.70	-1.37
13. Easy to approach for help?	6.90	0.98	7.27	0.74	-1.34	7.11	0.68	7.56	0.69	-2.14*
14. Free from interfering language habits?	6.76	1.68	7.47	0.54	-1.65	7.74	0.50	7.94	0.60	-1.19
15. Able to stimulate subject interest?	6.14	1.28	6.45	0.97	-0.87	6.96	0.73	6.99	0.97	-0.12
Summary items....										
16. Overall Course Rating ?	6.43	1.39	6.56	1.23	-0.33	7.06	0.76	7.18	1.02	-0.45
17. Overall Instructor Rating?	6.16	1.00	6.34	0.99	-0.59	6.78	0.65	6.80	1.01	-0.10
18. Outside preparation Time?	7.46	0.52	7.60	0.43	-0.98	7.71	0.41	7.75	0.30	-0.39

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Note: rating scale ranged from 1 = very low/never to 9 = very high/always for items 1-17; rating scale for item 18 was 9=0 to 4 hours, 8=4 to 8 hours, 7=8 to 12 hours, 6=12 to 16 hours, and 5=16+ hours.

Table 2

t-Values for Mean Differences in Students' Evaluations of Full-Time (FT) and Part-Time (PT) Instructors in Quantitative and Non-Quantitative Graduate Business Administration Courses (Private Research University)

Evaluation Item	Quantitative					Non-Quantitative				
	FT Faculty n = 184		PT Faculty n = 85			FT Faculty n = 64		PT Faculty n = 27		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	t
To what extent do you (the student) feel that...										
1. Something of value learned?	4.04	0.46	4.01	0.50	0.60	4.08	0.41	3.71	0.76	3.00**
2. Subject interest increased by course?	3.83	0.49	3.70	0.52	2.13*	3.92	0.47	3.44	0.76	3.68**
3. Course material learned/understood?	3.88	0.35	3.91	0.37	-0.77	4.06	0.30	3.80	0.46	3.16**
4. Instructor enthusiastic about course?	4.20	0.47	4.07	0.58	2.06*	4.2[illegible]	0.43	3.92	0.71	2.59*
5. Actual/proposed objectives agreed?	3.86	0.50	3.89	0.47	-0.58	3.90	0.48	3.49	0.72	3.20**
6. Lectures facilitated taking notes?	3.67	0.58	3.57	0.57	1.33	3.62	0.50	3.14	0.62	3.84**
7. Instructor encouraged discussions?	4.10	0.44	4.00	0.53	1.54	4.39	0.36	4.03	0.60	3.54**
8. Expression of ideas/opinions encouraged?	4.03	0.45	3.92	0.46	1.75	4.26	0.39	3.95	0.58	2.99**
9. Seeking help/advice encouraged?	4.12	0.49	4.00	0.40	1.97*	4.06	0.40	3.96	0.56	0.99
10. Class and exam emphasis similar?	3.84	0.50	3.90	0.54	-0.80	3.70	0.44	3.36	0.69	2.78**
Summary items....										
11. Overall Course Rating?	3.78	0.59	3.66	0.65	1.58	3.82	0.54	3.20	0.89	4.04**
12. Overall Instructor Rating?	3.99	0.61	3.83	0.68	1.95	4.01	0.52	3.36	0.89	4.33**
13. Outside preparation Time?	2.87	0.54	2.85	0.54	0.30	2.74	0.50	2.64	0.58	0.83

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ Note: rating scale ranged from 1 = very poor to 5 = very good for items 1-12; rating scale for item 13 was 1 = 0 to 2 hours, 2 = 2 to 5 hours, 3 = 5 to 7 hours, 4 = 7 to 12 hours, and 5 = over 12 hours.

Table 3

Comparison of Results for Sample Universities on Similar/Identical Evaluation Items

	Private Research University Item(#)	t Quant.	Non-Quant.	Comprehensive State University Item(#)	t Quant.	Non-Quant.
ENTHUSIASM						
+	Instructor enthusiastic about course? (4)	2.06*	2.59*	Instructor enthusiastic about teaching course? (10)	-1.16	-2.18*
EXAMINATIONS						
+	Class and exam emphasis similar? (10)	-0.80	2.78**	Class and exam emphasis similar? (3)	1.60	0.69
INTERACTION						
+	Instructor encouraged discussions? (7)	1.54	3.54**	Able to involve students in discussion? (12)	-1.51	-1.37
+	Expression of ideas/opinions encouraged? (8)	1.75	2.99**	Considerate of student point-of-view? (11)	-1.27	-2.12*
LEARNING						
+	Something of value learned?(1)	0.60	3.00**	Something of value learned? (6)	-0.15	-0.35
+	Course material learned/understood? (3)	-0.77	3.16**	Course contents mastered? (7)	-0.44	-0.45
ORGANIZATION						
+	Actual/proposed objectives agreed? (5)	-0.58	3.20**	Course objectives adequately outlined? (2)	-0.36	-1.14
+	Lectures facilitated taking notes? (6)	1.33	3.84**	Presentations prepared and organized? (4)	1.15	0.03
RAPPORT						
+	Seeking help/advice encouraged? (9)	1.97*	0.99	Easy to approach for help? (13)	-1.34	-2.14*
OVERALL RATING						
+	Instructor (12)	1.95	4.33**	Instructor (17)	-0.59	-0.10
+	Course (11)	1.58	4.04**	Course (16)	-0.33	-0.45

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$